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ABSTRACT

The Synergistic Model of Organizational Career Development is a new model of organizational career development that combines the best of career development practice and organizational development into a unified, coherent model. The model has three levels of organization: philosophical, strategic, and practical. Expanding circles are used to illustrate movement from the broad philosophical vision to strategic plans and then to the practical need for acquisition and demonstration of specific competencies. The model encourages employees and organizations to dream (philosophical level), plan (strategic level), and perform (practical level). The personal and organizational vision circles are represented by the center rings to denote their role in regulating the other subsystems. The focus on competence is represented by the outer rings to denote their role in providing feedback to the rest of the system regarding the requirements of the world of work: the competencies that employees require to remain employable and organizations require to remain competitive. This feedback helps employees and organizations adjust to changes in the world of work and monitor their plans and strategies to ensure optimum fulfillment of their respective visions. The result is a synergistic reaction in which "the whole is greater than the sum of its parts." (28 references) (MN)

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A Synergistic Model of Organizational Career Development

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Abstract

Paper presented at the 25th National Consultation on Career Development (NATCON) in Ottawa, Canada. This paper provides a brief description of a new model of organizational career development. Specifically, the paper outlines the major components of the model and describes the importance of each aspect of the model for meeting the needs of employees and organizations.

A Synergistic Model of Organizational Career Development

This paper provides a brief theoretical introduction to a new model of organizational career development. The model was designed to bring the best of career development practice and organizational development together into one unified and coherent model. Unfortunately, employee career development frequently occurs in isolation from organizational development initiatives (Bernes & Magnusson, 1996). By operating as separate systems, opportunities for integration and thus synergies are lost. Balancing and interactive processes along with parallel systemic concepts allow these previously separate systems to work together. The remainder of this paper will now describe the key concepts that are relevant to a theoretical overview of the model.

Insert Figure 1 about here

The model possesses three levels of organization: the philosophical level, the strategic level, and the practical level. Expanding circles are used to illustrate movement from the broad philosophical vision to strategic plans and then to the practical need for the acquisition and demonstration of specific competencies. More specifically, the model encourages employees and organizations to dream (philosophical level), plan (strategic level), and then perform (practical level).

The personal and organizational vision circles are represented by the center rings to denote their role in regulating the other subsystems. The focus on competencies is represented by the outer rings to denote their role in providing feedback to the rest of the system regarding the requirements of the world of work—specifically the competencies required to remain employable (in the case of the employee) and competitive (in the case of the organization). This feedback helps employees and organizations to adjust to changes in the world of work and therefore monitor their plans and strategies to ensure the most optimal fulfillment of their respective visions. Each component of the model will now be described.

The Employee

Philosophical level: personal vision. The model begins with the generic goal of encouraging employees to establish their own personal vision. A personal vision provides one with an idealistic view of one's life and career. Establishing a personal vision allows employees to become authors of their own life stories, wherein they can begin to interact with the external environment with a sense of empowerment, personal responsibility, or agency (Cochran, 1992; Peavy, 1994). Without strong visions, people may become immobilized by the many barriers and constraints inherent in the world of work. Practitioners can help individuals to establish personal visions by engaging them in a variety of exercises, e.g., guided visualizations (Crozier, 1994); pride stories (Alberta Advanced Education & Career Development, 1996); and the dependable strengths articulation process (Peavy, 1994). Senge et al. (1994) also combine elements of some of the above exercises with value clarification to help individuals establish their visions.

Strategic level: personal career management plan. The employee's task at this level is to plan for how he/she can implement his/her vision. The employee begins by assessing the gap between what ought to be (the personal vision) and what is (the present) (Cochran, 1992). This facilitates the process of exploring possible strategies to close the gap between the present and the ideal. Therefore, the establishment of a personal career management plan is the process whereby an individual envisions his/her future and then develops plans to achieve that future. The employee may also engage in a process of self-assessment in order to determine the most appropriate methods of closing the gap between the desired and the present.

Developing a personal career management plan implies a need for the employee to negotiate his/her personal vision within the confines of external realities, and to balance his/her dreams, wishes, and desires with external demands. External realities may place a variety of demands upon the individual (e.g., the need to stay employable, the need to develop new competencies, etc.). The real challenge at this level is to plan for how one can obtain progressively

larger pieces of one's personal vision through one's interaction with the world of work. To do this, the individual must have a clear and potent personal vision. It is also important for the individual to be able to assess the needs of the external environment (i.e., the world of work). This may involve gathering information, exploring ideas, obtaining feedback from others, establishing short- and long-term plans, and setting implementation goals.

Practical level: acquisition and demonstration of specific competencies. To facilitate employee career development, the practical level encourages the individual to break down his/her personal career management plan into the competencies required for the attainment of his/her short- and long-term goals (see Fig. 1). Employee competencies refer to the knowledge, skills, and attitudes that underlie effective performance in a particular role (Hendry & Maggio, 1996; McLagan, 1996). To remain on target, individuals must continuously self-evaluate and set goals for the acquisition and demonstration of such competencies.

Knowledge factors may include knowledge about the world of work, particular organizations, work roles, where organizations and/or their competition are moving, and internal and external opportunities and constraints (Niven, 1997). Skills include role-specific skills (e.g., financial analysis and accounting) and transferable skills (e.g., the ability to market oneself; communication skills, and time management). Attitudes refer to one's beliefs about change, work, and interpersonal relationships as well as the meaning of work in the larger context of one's life. When individuals focus on competencies, they can clarify expectations and develop a contribution-based mentality that accentuates individual accountability toward organizational objectives. In other words, it provides individuals with the means to demonstrate their impact upon organizational goals and to enhance their employability.

The Organization

The organizational side of the model parallels the above-noted employee conceptualizations; each level will now be described separately.

Philosophical level: organizational vision. The organizational side of the model begins with the generic goal of encouraging the organization to articulate its vision. Like personal visions, organizational visions inspire action by engaging employees in bold missions with superordinate goals (Quinn et al., 1996). Collins and Porras (1994) refer to these goals as 'big hairy audacious goals' (or BHAG for short) to denote their role in reaching out and grabbing people in the gut. Quinn et al. (1996) suggest that great organizational successes are a result of powerful alignment between organizational visions, strategies, and goals. Consequently, the articulation of an organizational vision serves as the foundation for strategic planning and goal setting (Below, Morrisey, & Acomb, 1987; Hill & Jones, 1989; Quinn et al., 1996).

An organization's mission statement is a succinct statement of the action it will take to realize its vision. The mission statement serves the purpose of operationalizing the vision and focusing the organization's attention and energy (Fuqua & Kurpius, 1993). Essentially, organizations attempt to formulate and communicate their view of the future—their vision—through a mission statement (Morgan et al., 1988).

By articulating an organizational vision and mission, organizations begin to take charge of their own futures—just as individuals do when they establish their personal visions (Quinn et al., 1996). In sum, the process of clearly envisioning an organization's or an individual's desired future has a major motivating potential because human beings strive to achieve their ideal. By involving members of an organization in the envisioning process, commitment and ownership are developed (Frey, 1990). A clearly articulated organizational vision represents the foundation for the strategic utilization of human resources.

Strategic level: organizational human resource strategic plan. The concept of the organizational human resource strategic plan parallels the concept of the employee's personal career management plan. The organization's task at this level is to plan for how it can implement its vision through the strategic utilization of its human resources. The organization begins by assessing

the gap between the desired future (the organizational vision) and the present (Frey, 1990). By comparing the desired with the present, the issues that require attention become clarified and major priorities are articulated (Hill & Jones, 1989). This facilitates the process of exploring possible strategies to close the gap between the present and the ideal.

Appropriate methods of closing the gap between the desired and the present are determined by an analysis of external and internal environments. The goal of external analysis is to identify strategic opportunities and threats in the organization's environment (Hill & Jones, 1989; Schuler & Walker, 1994). This involves analyzing the competitive position of the organization and its major rivals along with examining the social, governmental, legal, international, and technical factors that may affect the organization (Golembiewski et al., 1992; Hill & Jones, 1989). The next component of strategic planning involves an internal analysis of the strengths and weaknesses of the organization. An internal analysis also identifies the quantity and quality of resources available to the organization (Golembiewski et al.,1992; Hill & Jones, 1989).

The external and internal analyses result in the identification of a series of strategic alternatives. The goal is to select the strategies that result in the best alignment between external environmental opportunities and threats and the internal strengths and weaknesses of the organization (Hill & Jones, 1989).

As an organization articulates its business strategy (e.g., cost leadership, product differentiation, etc.), it also has to consider whether it has developed (or can develop) the necessary human resources. Without the right people in the right positions, no strategy—however well-formulated in other respects—is likely to succeed. This recognition has led to the development of the field of strategic human resource planning (Hill & Jones, 1989).

The first step toward the strategic utilization of human resources is to complete a human resources forecast. This is an attempt to project the quantity and quality of the workforce that will be required to implement strategic plans (Butler, Ferris, & Napier, 1991; Dolan & Schuler, 1994;

Hill & Jones, 1989; Schuler & Walker, 1994). The next step involves the development of a human resources inventory, which lists the human resources currently available within the organization. The last step involves identifying the gap between what is available and what is needed. To remediate deficiencies, the organization may decide to hire new employees and/or train existing employees.

In essence, the strategic plan and the human resource strategic plan provide a 'road map' of how the organization plans to fulfill the vision it has set for itself. By establishing short- and long-term plans, the organization begins to create a broadly based strategy for engaging in the activities required to ensure the successful achievement of its vision. Ultimately, the activities selected by the organization will require specific employee competencies.

Practical level: alignment of employee competencies to required organizational competencies. Achieving an organizational vision through strategic planning ultimately necessitates the identification of the competencies required from employees. Employee competencies refer to the knowledge, skills, and attitudes that underlie effective performance in a particular role (Hendry & Maggio, 1996; McLagan, 1996). Organizational competencies are the firm, specific resources and capabilities that enable the organization to develop, choose, and implement value-enhancing strategies. Organizational competencies include all firm-specific assets, knowledge, skills, and capabilities within the organization's structure, technology, and processes (Wilson, 1994), and particularly to those areas in which the organization excels and which therefore give it a competitive advantage (Kandola, 1996). For example, Honda's expertise in 'dealer management' (its ability to train and support its dealer network with operating procedures and policies for merchandising, selling, floor planning, and service management) provides a competitive advantage (Stalk, Evans, & Shulman, 1992).

Once an organization has chosen a strategy that accentuates its strengths (organizational competencies), it can then define the employee competencies required in order to implement its

strategic plans (Kandola, 1996; Souque, 1996). This does not preclude an organization from defining its strategy—and even shifting strategies—based on employee performance or input. Lists of employee competencies can be used as criteria for training, curriculum design, recruitment, selection, assessment, coaching, counselling, mentoring, career development, and succession planning (Hendry & Maggio, 1996; McLagan, 1996).

Although the idea behind competency-based systems has been around since the 1980's, it is only recently that the use of competencies has been applied to human resource strategies that are aligned with business strategies (Hendry & Maggio, 1996). Focusing on competencies clarifies expectations and encourages a contribution-based mentality and individual accountability. This enhances employee commitment and their capacity to learn (Hendry & Maggio, 1996).

Like individuals, organizations need to remain in touch with external realities in order to modify their visions and strategic plans as well as to update the competencies they require from their workforces. This focus on continuous monitoring and subsequent refining provides feedback to the organization to ensure its continued competitiveness and thus its existence.

Balancing/Interactive Processes

The two triangles in the middle of Figure 1 graphically represent the balancing/interactive processes. The goal of these processes is to bring employee career development and organizational development closer together—in other words, to create closer alignments between the employee and the organization. Essentially, the balancing/interactive processes are designed to help bring employees and organizations closer together, thereby avoiding the situation of treating career development and organizational development as separate entities.

Philosophical level: reciprocal confirmation. The first step toward employee and organizational alignment involves the balancing/interactive process of reciprocal confirmation. The process of reciprocal confirmation refers to the goal of creating a shared vision between employees and the organization. The possession of a shared vision leads to greater levels of employee

commitment (Senge, 1990; Senge et al., 1994) which in turn lead to higher levels of productivity and reduced turnover (Lee et al., 1992; Meyer et al., 1989). Meyer et al. (1989) found that higher levels of affective commitment (when employees really care about the organization, its vision, etc.) were the best predictors of higher productivity ratings. This is congruent with the idea that a shared, meaningful, and affective vision produces the energy that employees and organizations need in order to achieve extraordinary results (Plas, 1996; Quinn et al., 1996; Senge, 1990; Senge et al., 1994).

Reciprocal confirmation is the highest priority because the possession of a shared vision is more likely to result in employee and organizational agreement at the strategic and practical levels of the model. In other words, employees and organizations are more likely to agree on plans/strategies and required competencies if they agree on where the organization is heading.

Strategic level: critical discourse. The second step toward employee and organizational alignment involves the balancing/interactive process of critical discourse. Critical discourse refers to the process of communication by which informed, precise, and careful judgements can be made regarding the strategic utilization of human resources. This process facilitates movement toward the shared vision articulated at the philosophical level of the model.

To make the most informed decisions regarding the strategic utilization of human resources, organizations must obtain the views of their employees because front-line personnel are often closer to critical information (Plas, 1996; Quinn et al., 1996). This means that those who actually do the work must participate in the decision-making (Plas, 1996), and this implies the need for organizations to provide employees with increased access to information (e.g., corporate revenue, expenses, strategic plans, etc.).

Essentially, critical discourse engages employees in critical reflection and critical discussions with supervisors or managers. Within their own critical reflections, employees strategize, think about, and reflect upon their personal visions and the organization's vision. Meanwhile, the

organization engages in its own critical reflections, within management teams, to strategize, think about, and reflect upon their vision and strategies. Critical discussions between employees and supervisors then provide a forum for employees to influence organizational strategic plans and to strategically link their proposed career management plans to the strategic plans of the organization. In effect, the organization and the employee provide each other with feedback.

Practical level: monitoring and management. The process of monitoring and managing specific competencies is the last step to bring individuals and organizations into closer alignment. Monitoring and management refers to the ongoing need for observing, guiding, and ensuring that employees acquire and demonstrate essential competencies and that these competencies are appropriately aligned with organizational needs.

Within this process, employees monitor their plans and the external realities to ensure that they acquire and demonstrate the competencies required within the organization or within the world of work in general. Information obtained in the process of monitoring allows employees and organizations to refine the management of their respective competencies, plans, and visions. Meanwhile, the organization also engages in the processes of monitoring and management. In this case, it monitors its achievements within the external world and also monitors its employees to ensure that they perform the tasks that are essential to organizational success.

Summary

The ultimate goal of the Synergistic Model is to help employees to stay employable and organizations to stay competitive. Essentially, bridging the gap between employees and organizations means that employee career development cannot be considered without also focusing on the larger context of organizational development. Similarly, organizational development cannot be addressed without also considering employee development. Focusing on one without the other is incomplete because employee development occurs within the context of organizations. Meanwhile, organizations dehumanize the process of organizational development if

they do not include employees in that process. Furthermore, the needs of both parties are more likely to be met when we attend to both employee and organizational development. In fact, simultaneously attending to both creates a synergistic reaction, in which 'the whole is greater than the sum of its parts.'

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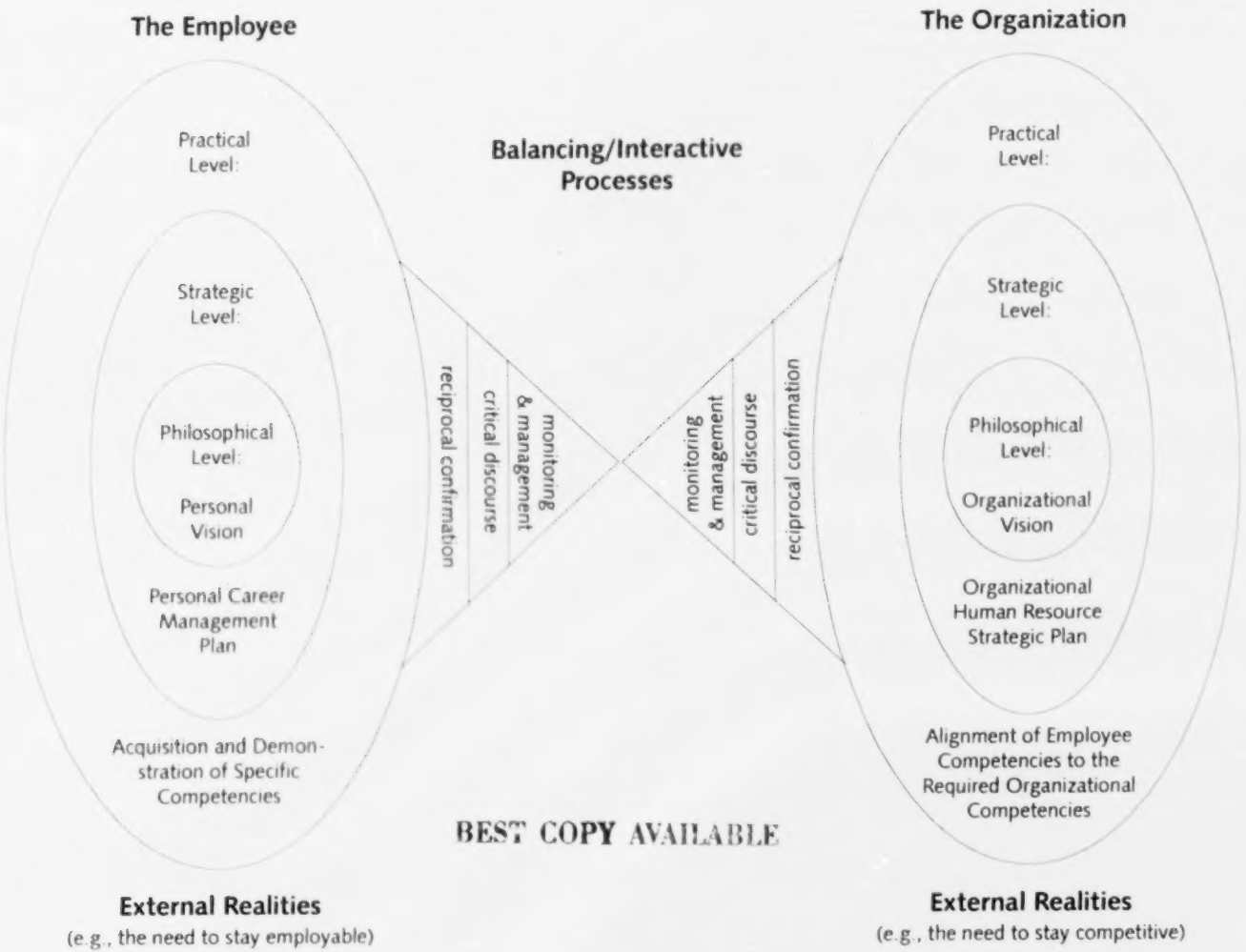
Figure 1
A Synergistic Model of Organizational Career Development



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